



the Old Spanish Trail

National Historic Trail Feasibility Study

Newsletter I • February 1998

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE TO PREPARE STUDY

The National Park Service (NPS) is preparing a study to determine if it is feasible and desirable to designate the Old Spanish Trail as a national historic trail. This newsletter explains the purpose of the study and invites community involvement and participation.

The Legislation

On November 12, 1996, Congress passed Public Law (PL) 104-333, the Omnibus Parks and Public Lands Management Act of 1996, which provided for an amendment to the study section 5(c) of the National Trails System Act (16 USC 1244c). This amendment directs the National Park Service to evaluate the feasibility and desirability of authorizing the Old Spanish Trail according to the National Trails System Act (PL 90-543, 16 USC 1241 et seq.). The legislation defines the Old Spanish Trail as beginning in Santa Fe, New Mexico, proceeding through Colorado and Utah, and ending in Los Angeles, California. The Northern Branch of the Old Spanish Trail begins near Espanola, New Mexico, proceeding through Colorado, and ending near Crescent Junction, Utah.

The Study

An NPS study team is preparing the feasibility study for the Old Spanish Trail. The team will use assistance from technical consultants, including representatives from local, state, and federal agencies, academic institutions, and individuals with interest in and knowledge of the trail.

The study team *will*

- collect and review existing information
- consult with interested individuals, organizations, and agencies
- evaluate the trail's eligibility for national historic trail authorization
- examine the changing routes
- evaluate the potential for public recreational use or historical interest
- prepare a draft document for public and agency review

The study team *will not*

- conduct primary research or archeological investigations
- recommend specific management actions

When completed, the study will be submitted to Congress. Any future federal involvement regarding the Old Spanish Trail as a national historic trail will depend on future congressional authorization.

National Historic Trails

National historic trails are extended trails that follow routes of travel that are historically significant. While national historic trail designation is continuous, the protected segments available for public visitation are not continuous. They may include portions or sections of land areas, land and water segments, or other specific sites. Together these entities form a chain or network of areas that are considered official components of the national historic trail. Some of the existing authorized national historic trails are the Santa Fe, Oregon, Pony Express, Mormon Pioneer, and Lewis and Clark Trails.

National historic trails, along with national scenic trails, are established by Congress as part of the National Trails System. National historic trail authorization means that federal funds would be available for the planning, development, and/or administration of the trail and related activities.

If Congress authorized a national historic trail, a management plan would be prepared to address public use and enjoyment of the trail and its associated values. Existing trail segments already in federal ownership would be eligible to be the initial components of the national trail. Other trail segments could be developed and protected through a variety of means such as cooperative agreements, easements, and actions by nonprofit organizations. Generally, there would be little if any acquisition of private lands.

National trails are managed through cooperative partnerships with public agencies, nonprofit organizations, and landowners. Collectively, these entities preserve significant sites within the trail corridor, develop opportunities for the public to retrace the historic route and to visit individual sites along the trail where they may learn about its history and significance, and provide for public recreational use based on historic interest and appreciation. The federal role is one of setting and maintaining standards, providing technical and limited financial assistance to partners, and helping to ensure consistent preservation, education, and public use programs.

Historical Background

The Old Spanish Trail is one of several historic trails that played a significant role in the history and development of the United States. The trail, which is approximately 1,300 miles long, continued to be used throughout the early decades of the westward expansion of the United States. Historically, the Old Spanish Trail developed as a series of variant routes north from Santa Fe. One of these went northwest from Abiquiú, New Mexico, to present Moab and Green River, Utah. Another route, later called the North Branch, ran through the San Luis Valley in Colorado and along the Gunnison River to the Colorado River. The two routes met near Green River, Utah, and continued over the Wasatch Mountains to the Great Basin. The Old Spanish Trail then wended southwest through southern Utah, southern Nevada, and the Mojave Desert to Los Angeles.

Between 1598 and 1821, Spaniards from New Mexico, led by their Indian guides, opened new pathways to the Utah country for trade. Similarly, Spanish explorations between Sonora and southern California demonstrated the feasibility of a route to New Mexico via the Mojave Desert. By 1830 some of these trails had developed into a series of important trade and migration routes reaching as far west as California. These trails became known as the Old Spanish Trail. After the Mormon settlement of Utah in 1846 and the subsequent founding of a Mormon community at San Bernardino, portions of the Old Spanish Trail became a vital supply route between Los Angeles and Salt Lake City.



With the closing of the Mormon colony in San Bernardino in 1857, trade between Utah and California decreased. Meanwhile, large numbers of immigrants pouring into California during the gold rush opened alternate routes to San Francisco and other points along the coast. With the establishment of the intercontinental railroad in 1869 and other rail routes, the Old Spanish Trail was gradually displaced as an immigration and commercial route.

As an important trade and immigration route, the Old Spanish Trail was a conduit for continuity and change. Travelers along the Old Spanish Trail conveyed Spanish-Mexican and Anglo-American culture and history throughout the Southwest.

The Opportunities

We invite you to participate in this study to help determine if this part of our American heritage should be commemorated through national historic trail designation. Public interest and support are essential measures of trail feasibility because these trails must be cooperatively managed to succeed.

The Congress recognizes the valuable contributions that volunteers and private, nonprofit trail groups have made to the development and maintenance of the Nation's trails. In recognition of these contributions, it is further the purpose of this Act to encourage and assist volunteer citizen involvement in the planning, development, maintenance, and management, where appropriate, of trails.

National Trails System Act
PL 90-543

To qualify for designation as a national historic trail, a trail must meet all three of the following criteria:

- 1) It must be a trail or route established by historic use and must be historically significant as a result of that use.*
- 2) It must be of national significance with respect to any of several broad facets of American History, such as trade and commerce, exploration, migration and settlement, or military campaigns.*
- 3) It must have significant potential for public recreational use or historical interest based on historical interpretation and appreciation.*

National Trails System Act
PL 90-543

Tasks & Schedule		
1	Winter 1997–1998	– Meet with interested people, agencies, and organizations – Field visits, data collection, and analysis
2	Summer and fall 1998	– Prepare draft study
3	Fall 1998	– Distribute draft for public review
4	Winter 1998	– Revise and transmit study to Congress